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NEWS RELEASE



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ACCESS TO JUVENILE COURT GOES PUBLIC STATEWIDE

Beginning July 1, 2004, access to dependency matters in juvenile court in all of Utah's eight judicial districts will become more open as a result of legislation enacted during the 2004 legislative session.

The Utah State Legislature enacted H.B. 90 during the 2004 legislative session, which changed the date—from July 1, 2005 to July 1, 2004—on which a person can be admitted to a child abuse, neglect, or dependency hearing in juvenile court.

During the 2003 legislative session, legislators passed H.B. 222 to allow expanded access to abuse, neglect, and dependency hearings in two pilot districts: Third District Juvenile Court (Salt Lake, Summit, and Tooele counties) and Sixth District Juvenile Court (Garfield, Kane, Piute, Sanpete, Sevier, and Wayne counties). When H.B. 90 goes into effect July 1, 2004, juvenile courts statewide will open to the public.

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“The public can now observe the proceedings and gain a far greater understanding of how child welfare cases are handled,” said Ray Wahl, juvenile court administrator for the Administrative Office of the Courts. “Our hope is that by allowing additional access to juvenile court, the public will come away with a greater understanding of the child protection system.” The change in access will now allow family and friends to attend hearings to support family members. About 3,500 dependency referrals are received by juvenile court each year.

Juvenile court judges maintain authority to close juvenile court proceedings if grounds exist to close the hearing. For example, if closing a proceeding is in the best interest of the child, if having others in the courtroom will impair the fact-finding process, or if allowing access is contrary to the interest of justice.

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The mission of the Utah Courts is to provide an open, fair, efficient, and independent system for the advancement of justice under the law.